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The anti-racist potential of care - political dimensions of women's engagement in voluntary refugee support work in Germany

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of gender in volunteering with refugees in Germany and how female volunteers, who outnumber male volunteers considerably, understand their involvement differently from men. Drawing upon quantitative data from two studies with volunteers in refugee work in Germany from 2015 and 2016, I discuss the motivations of female volunteers to engage in refugee support work, the meaning they give to their experience of working with refugees and the values they wish to demonstrate through their voluntary work. The article centrally maintains that refugee support work can be classed as a form of care work and is informed by an ethics and values of care. However, other results unveil that women interpret their care work as an expression of their political attitudes, specifically about anti-racism and anti-right-wing activism, as well, and thereby have recourse to a supposedly male political justification for engaging in volunteering. Thus, this article argues that these two forms of motivation for volunteering, care and politics, do not need to be mutually exclusive. Crucially, voluntary refugee support work represents a unique opportunity for women's political activism for anti-racism and cultural openness.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2015, a 'summer fairy tale' swept over Germany. After an unexpectedly large number of refugees arrived in the country, thousands of Germans flocked to train stations and emergency shelters to offer help in a possibly unprecedented wave of empathy with refugees. However, the autumnal disillusionment was not long in coming. Xenophobic populism and growing unease with Germany's extraordinary willingness to receive refugees soon started to creep into the public discourse. Eventually, the anti-refugee discourse led to the entry of the right-wing populist party *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) into the German parliament – a first for Germany since the Second World War.

Women have played a unique role in this debate. Making up the vast majority of volunteers in refugee support work (Karakayali & Kleist, 2015, 2016), they are particularly visible as defenders of a new politics of welcome. This plays against traditional gender stereotypes that restrict women to the unpolitical, private sphere (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010). Hence, the gendered nature of the discourse on refugees, as exemplified in volunteering, emerges as a crucial, interesting new field of current fault lines in gender relations.

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Academic research is only slowly beginning to turn its attention towards the impact of the refugee movement on German politics and society. This article contributes to closing the gap in the understanding of these recent developments by investigating the role voluntary work with refugees plays for women as political and social actors. It starts by conceptualising refugee support work as care work that is underpinned by a feminist ethics of care. I will demonstrate that the gendered character of refugee support work not only stems from a significant over-representation of female volunteers, but is also inherent in the volunteers' values and the work itself (see Wuthnow, 1995). Accordingly, my first hypothesis assumes that volunteering with refugees constitutes an example of traditionally female care work guided by values of care and compassion.

However, due to the intensely contentious nature of the refugee debate, the commitment to helping its primary targets inevitably implies political positioning. Therefore, my second hypothesis adds to the care approach by demonstrating that voluntary work with refugees also carries political dimensions. This hypothesis follows the claims of feminist political scientists (Coffé, 2013; Stolle & Hooghe, 2011) who maintain that the study of political participation has long overlooked women's political concerns and forms of activism. I argue that refugee support work constitutes one of these neglected forms of activism, as both the subject matter – a local and social issue – and the form of activism – civil engagement – is traditionally dismissed as a non-political female occupation.

To test these hypotheses, this article seeks to uncover why women dominate voluntary work with refugees to such a large extent and explores the motives and aims of female volunteers. It analyses the values and belief systems they invoke using statistical and binary logistic regression analyses of two quantitative surveys with volunteers in refugee support work in Germany from 2015 and 2016. The empirical results from these studies support both hypotheses. The majority of common activities in refugee support work fall under the definition of care work, and main motivations link to care values specified by care ethics as well. Among other indications, the vast over-representation of female volunteers suggests that women are more likely to be drawn to this form of care work. Strikingly, however, two motivations focusing on political aims of volunteering are overwhelmingly more likely to be supported by female volunteers. This finding shows that through volunteering, women act on their political values of tolerance and diversity.

To begin with, I will expand on the theoretical background of care theories and women's political participation. This section also demonstrates how care and politics have traditionally been gendered in volunteerism research. A methodological overview provides further detail on the two quantitative studies used, and describes the approach to data analysis. The next section presents the empirical results of the quantitative analysis in more detail. Finally, the discussion relates the empirical findings to my hypotheses and academic literature, finishing off with a concluding summary.

Literature review

Gendered patterns in volunteering

While there is a controversial debate on the definition of volunteering (Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010), this study relies on the interpretation by Susan J. Ellis and Katherine H. Noyes (1990, p. 4) who state that 'to volunteer is to choose to act in recognition of a need, with an attitude of social responsibility and without concern for monetary profit, going beyond one's basic obligations.' Much of the research on volunteering originated in the United States and rests on the assumption that women are more likely to volunteer than men (Wilson, 2012). However, in their exhaustive meta-review across a number of different countries, contexts and empirical studies, Robert Musick and John Wilson (2008) found no clear direction of whether women or men are more likely to volunteer. In general, gender differences tend to be quite small and can vary across domain or country (Einolf, 2011). In Germany, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth regularly carries out a *Freiwilligensurvey* (German Survey on Volunteering) and found

that German women generally volunteer less than men (Simonson, Vogel, & Tesch-Römer, 2017). Consistent with findings from other countries, women's level of engagement varies across domains of volunteering. They volunteer most in the areas of care, e.g. youth and child care, while men dominate in most other areas (Vogel, Simonson, Ziegelmann, & Tesch-Römer, 2017).

In the study of volunteering, these gender differences have been investigated from various angles. Structural approaches address differential access to resources such as education, social capital or employment which generally inhibit women's likelihood to volunteer (Einolf, 2011; Gerstel, 2000), while others, for example church membership or motherhood, encourage volunteering among women (Musick & Wilson, 2008). However, quantitative analyses show that socio-demographic characteristics often cannot fully account for gender differences in volunteering (Dekker & Halman, 2003), turning the attention towards potential motivational differences between men and women. The study on gender differences in motivations to volunteers has been equally varied and contested. Originating in social psychology, the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) predominates in volunteerism research (Clary et al., 1998). In the VFI, women tend to rate all factors higher, which suggests that they possess a stronger motivation to volunteer in general (Einolf, 2011). Other psychological research found that women seem to be more prosocial, compassionate and more likely to feel responsibility and moral obligation towards others (Einolf, 2011; Musick & Wilson, 2008). Crucially, however, social theory argues that these psychological differences are socially constructed and stem from culture and childhood socialisation (Gerstel, 2000). Consequently, studies on female volunteering have devoted considerable attention to the influence of the social context and cultural beliefs on motivations to volunteer. Cultural analyses conceptualise volunteering as a means to express basic human values (Hustinx et al., 2010), choosing from an internalised repertoire of cultural norms available at a certain place and time. Values and culture hence have a strong influence on the configuration of voluntary work, particularly on choosing the domain of volunteering (Musick & Wilson, 2008).

A female ethic of care

As a starting point, Robert Wuthnow (1991) demonstrated that the values of compassion and care are strongly associated with volunteering. Therefore, feminist discussions of care prove particularly insightful to investigate the cultural context that influences women to attach more value to helping and caring for others than men (Einolf, 2011; Themudo, 2009). Care work is most commonly understood as relational action, often face-to-face, directed at a person or group that results from recognising and then assuming responsibility for a need for caring (Rummary & Fine, 2012; Tronto, 1998). When deconstructing cultural values of care work further, emotional connection, relationality and feelings of responsibility for needs of others emerge as basic elements (Duffy, 2005). Considering Ellis and Noyes' (1990, p. 4) definition of volunteering cited above, acting 'in recognition of a need' centrally defines volunteering as well. Thus, I concur with Pamela Herd and Madonna Harrington Meyer (2002) that volunteering also constitutes a form of care work.

Traditional gender norms have constructed care as a female domain that rests on women's intrinsic motivation and concern about the well-being of others (Folbre, 2012). Thus, feminist theory has preoccupied itself intensely with the antecedents, ethics and social consequences of care. Most famously, Carol Gilligan (1982) formulated the concept of an 'ethics of care' that supposedly characterises women's moral reasoning and distinct 'different voice' in ethical matters. She argued that from childhood on, girls are socialised to focus on responsibility, relationships, compassion and the needs of others. In contrast, boys acquire an 'ethics of justice' that concentrates on personal autonomy, rationality, abstraction and hierarchy. In subsequent years, empirical studies criticised Gilligan's theory for methodological flaws, questionable replicability, using sex categories rather than gender role identity and most importantly, sustaining traditional binary gender stereotypes (Skoe, Cumberland, Eisenberg, Hansen, & Perry, 2002). Nevertheless, the ethics of care have sparked a lively debate that gained traction in various fields ranging from disability

studies to political science and law (Duffy, 2005; Rummery & Fine, 2012). Consequently, care ethics have also profoundly influenced volunteerism research. The above-cited research on women's more prosocial volunteering motivations directly links to discussions of care values, as Robert Wuthnow (1995) convincingly demonstrated in his study on young people's gendered understandings of volunteering.

Considering women's remarkable over-representation in voluntary work with refugees, I propose that refugee support work can be interpreted as an expression of care. Volunteering practices often entail close relationships, for example when providing direct, practical support with everyday life, and they presume a great amount of empathy, particularly when volunteering with cultural others. Therefore, the first hypothesis this paper will test states that women are drawn to volunteering with refugees because it speaks to values of care and compassion, which are constructed as inherently female.

Political dimensions of volunteering with refugees

Politics was long constructed as a male domain, which potentially explains women's lower involvement in traditional political activities and their lower political interest and knowledge (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). However, reacting to the ongoing decline of traditional forms of political participation, political science has increasingly turned to the study of less conventional forms of participation. For instance, Joakim Ekman and Erik Amnå (2012) argued that extra-parliamentary, latent and informal activities such as civic engagement should be acknowledged as forms of political participation and expressing political values. Moreover, René Bekkers (2005) showed that political values and attitudes are strongly correlated with voluntary work and suggested that political interest might affect the likelihood to volunteer positively. Crucially here, Herd and Meyer (2002) convincingly contend that voluntary care work should also be included into definitions of civic engagement. Tatjana Thelen (2015) even goes one step further suggesting that care is fundamental for processes of political belonging in the public sphere.

Strikingly, in these newer forms of political participation, the so-called gender gap in political participation is challenged, sometimes even reversing itself (Stolle & Hooghe, 2011). Women seem to prefer private activism or smaller-scale forms of participation that fit more easily into their private lives (Sartori, Tuorto, & Ghigi, 2017). What is more, feminist political scientists have also challenged the meaning of the 'political' in the wake of second-wave feminism. When 'politics' is understood in traditional gender biased terms of national and institutional contexts, female concerns centred on local and community issues remain neglected (Coffé, 2013). Only a broader recognition of 'politics' also encompassing social issues and local policy levels brings to light women's political engagement as well.

I thus argue that while men and women both possess political values, they tend to act on them differently. Voluntary support for refugees serves as a paradigmatic tool for female political participation. While first appearing as a humanitarian matter of caring for and integrating newcomers, refugee support work arguably connects to a highly politicised discourse as well (Vollmer & Karakayali, 2017). The debate on refugees has dominated the German public discourse since the summer of 2015 and was a key topic in the federal elections of 2017. While on the one hand, the public celebrated the outstanding support and many Germans' readiness to volunteer for refugees, on the other hand, growing xenophobic right-wing sentiment culminated in the entry of the populist anti-immigrant party *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) into the German parliament. In such a polarised discourse, the commitment to volunteering with refugees inevitably implies taking a side in the debate and therefore sends a clear political signal. Indeed, Lorenzo Zamponi (2017) argued that acting in solidarity with refugees is closely connected to political action, be it through direct political claim-making or as a starting point for further politicisation. Moreover, volunteering might be an especially 'female-friendly' way of taking a stand against racism, as it combines political aims with care acts. Lesley McMillan (2004) already demonstrated that in Australia, feminist forms of activism like refugee and rape crisis centres serve a dual function of both providing care

and campaigning for political change. In consequence, my second hypothesis states that volunteering with refugees has political dimensions as well. It functions as a way to oppose right-wing extremism and racism, and to campaign for an open, tolerant culture (Hamann & Karakayali, 2016). Thus, political and non-political motivations are not mutually exclusive and contribute to the meaning of voluntary work to a similar extent.

Hypotheses

- (1) Refugee support work constitutes a form of care work that is deeply gendered.
- (2) Women's participation in refugee support work also serves political functions of anti-racism.

Methods

This article is based on quantitative data from two studies on voluntary refugee support work in Germany led by Olaf J. Kleist and Serhat Karakayali from the *Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Research*. While three studies have been conducted in total, of which the main results of the first two have already been published (Karakayali & Kleist, 2015, 2016), this study only concentrates on the second and third wave executed in 2015 and 2016, and omits the first study of 2014. The fieldwork for the 2014 study was carried out before the rupture in refugee support work in the summer of 2015, when an unprecedented number of refugees changed the organisation of refugee support work considerably (Karakayali & Kleist, 2016). Hence, the findings of this first study are not directly comparable to the other two, as the fieldwork took place under vastly different circumstances.

For both studies, an online survey was emailed to the *Flüchtlingsräte* (Councils for Refugees) of the federal German states with the request to forward it to volunteers. The *Flüchtlingsräte* are umbrella organisations for refugee support work connecting most organisations and initiatives in each federal state, therefore they generally represent the field of German refugee support work well. They are able to reach a large number of diverse volunteers, resulting in limited sample selection bias. However, a representative framework to compare this study's sample composition against does not exist and it was not possible to weigh the data accordingly. The nation-wide German *Freiwilligensurvey* (German Survey on Volunteering) has last been carried out in 2014, before the changes of 2015, and is only due to be repeated in 2019, so it did not yet include the sub-field of refugee support work. Consequently, the representativeness of the sample could not be ensured completely and due caution should be exercised when interpreting the data. After the publication of the next wave of the *Freiwilligensurvey*, the analysis could be re-run weighted on this study's sample composition of volunteers in refugee support work.

In 2015, 2,291 active or former volunteers in Germany aged 16 or above completed the survey between 22 October and 23 November. It was about 20 minutes long and covered multiple topic areas including the nature of the voluntary work; organisational circumstances; reasons and motivations to volunteer; the experience of volunteering; attitudes on media discourses or political issues; and aims and rewards of volunteering. Serhat Karakayali and Olaf J. Kleist (2016) published the main results in an overview report. The third wave of the study ran between 7 December 2016 and 8 January 2017 using the same research method and sample as before, resulting in 1,286 completions. The survey used an only slightly adapted version of the 2015 questionnaire and is thus directly comparable to the data from 2015. Out of the items tested below, only one question aiming at the function of volunteering changed, from 'to show that, besides right-wing populism and violence, a culture of welcome also exists' to 'to act against right-wing mobilisation in my city/ neighbourhood'. The researchers wanted to avoid the term 'welcome culture', which volunteers increasingly criticised. However, the results remained highly statistically significant, suggesting that the question was interpreted similarly across both waves of the study. The main results of the 2016 wave have not been published yet.

The definition of categories represents a critical point of any analysis by gender. For the question 'What is your gender', the survey provided three answer options: male, female, other. For the purpose of data analysis by gender, the 'other' option ($n(2015) = 22$, $n(2016) = 11$) was removed and only the categories male and female fed into the statistical models. As the sample numbers were too low to make any statistically meaningful comparisons, this paper is reproducing the binary gender system that the ethics of care is generally based on as well (Hankivsky, 2014). The omission of this category from the research findings means that unavoidably, some perspectives will be missing that could potentially produce interesting challenges to the interpretation of the findings as a political ethics of care. Indeed, Hines (2007) questioned and extended the research on care by explicitly looking at transgender caring practices which stress agency, shared experience and distinct identity positions. Similarly, while research on non-binary refugees is sparse, studies of sexual minority refugees shows that their support needs differ considerably, for example the need for a sense of belonging to queer racialised communities in order to resist intersecting racism and sexism or for specialised knowledge to assert credibility during asylum hearings (Lee & Brotman, 2011; Murray, 2011). Relating a queer ethics of care to these refugee spaces may greatly expand the scope of this article's argument for a political care orientation in refugee support work. Therefore, it would be valuable to do a fully inclusive analysis with those who do not identify as gender-binary in the future, for example with a survey specifically targeting queer activists, a survey with a larger sample size that would then also include a larger number of those identifying as non-binary or a qualitative analysis of queer refugee support work.

Looking at the sample by gender, it is important to note that the age profile of male and female volunteers differs remarkably. In 2015, 45% and in 2016, 61% of male volunteers were aged 60 or over. In contrast, only 20% (2015) and 35% (2016) of female volunteers belonged to this age category. This strong age difference mediates a number of variables, for example employment status.

Apart from standard statistical analysis, I employed binary logistic regression analyses of some variables to separate the effect of age from gender. The questions all used Likert scales with 4- or 5-point scales. The data analysis combined the two top scores (agree strongly and agree) to obtain stronger validity in the findings. Gender, age, education, employment status, financial situation, religion, migration background and birth in Germany fed into the regression as independent variables. While the first six variables commonly show strong correlations with likelihood to volunteer (Musick & Wilson, 2008), migration background and birth in Germany were added to account for any effects of former experience of migration on helping current newcomers.

Results

The following data analysis combines the data of 2015 and 2016, as separately, both years show similar results and a larger sample number potentially yields more robust findings. The tables for the binary logistic regression analyses display values for the eight independent variables described above with a main focus on gender. Asterisks indicate a high significance level of p-values.

Refugee support work as care work

To demonstrate that refugee support work can be classified as care work, this section first examines the actual constitution of the everyday work. The table below details the five most common activities that volunteers specified in the surveys (Table 1).

All of the above tasks involve direct, face-to-face relationships with other people, with the exception of 'other practical help' which remains ambiguous. Furthermore, most of the tasks, potentially with the exception of relationships to the local community, are directed towards clearly identifiable needs the recipients cannot satisfy themselves such as learning the German language or dealing with German bureaucracy and law. As demonstrated above, relationality is the most defining feature of the definition of care (Duffy, 2005), and recognizing and addressing specific needs is an inherent part of the caring activity (Tronto, 1998).

Table 1. Main activities.

Activity	Total % of volunteers engaging in this activity
Language classes	46%
Visit to the authorities	45%
Other practical help	41%
Support of other volunteers	41%
Relationship to the local community	32%
N	3577

To test motivations relating to care ethics, the analysis examined responses to the question ‘Why did you decide to volunteer in refugee support work?’. The table below details the percentage of those stating the relevant item ‘applies’ or ‘rather applies’ (Table 2).

As becomes clear, the main motivation to volunteer with refugees springs from a firm conviction that caring for those in need comprises an essential moral obligation. This explicitly ties in with central elements of care work and ethics, such as the recognition and assumption of responsibility for people exhibiting need (Tronto, 1998).

Having demonstrated that refugee support work constitutes a form of care work, I now aim to establish its gendered character. Remarkably, women are significantly over-represented among the participants. In 2015, they constituted 76% and in 2016, they made up 70% of the total sample. Interestingly, women are particularly over-represented in the younger age group of volunteers under 60 years old (2015: 82%; 2016: 79% of those under 60). Contrasting common assumptions in volunteerism research that middle-aged women tend to volunteer less because of the time-constraints resulting from child-rearing and work (Musick & Wilson, 2008), refugee support work seems to be so attractive to women that it even surmounts these structural barriers. Thus, women in particular are drawn to voluntary refugee support work, as to care work generally (Karakayali & Kleist, 2016).

Moreover, a binary regression analysis of the answer ‘The feeling of not having idly watched the suffering of others’ to a question about the rewards of volunteering reveals that female volunteers are more likely to agree with this statement ($p = 0.019$), as well as older volunteers. Again, this finding connects to a moral obligation to help and care once the need for caring is recognised, which is a main element of Tronto’s (1998) model of care work. In conclusion, the above data supports the first hypothesis that refugee support work is a form of care work that is gendered and attracts women more than men (Table 3).

Political dimensions of refugee support work

To test the second hypothesis, the influence of political motives on women’s understanding of refugee support work, I investigated answer codes to a question on the goals of volunteering, ‘Do

Table 2. Main motivations.

	Total % of ‘applies’/rather applies’
Because I generally believe that you have to care for disadvantaged people.	86%
Because I am generally interested in people from different cultures.	69%
Because I can understand very well how people are feeling that are fleeing from war.	67%
Because they were on site and someone had to take care of them.	59%
Because through media reports, I learned how difficult it is for those people in Germany.	47%
In my social environment it is generally considered important to support refugees and other socially disadvantaged groups.	42%
Close relatives or friends inspired me.	16%
Because I wanted to volunteer and there were not many other offers.	11%
N	3577

Table 3. Net agreement to 'The feeling of not having idly watched the suffering of others' (strongly agree (1) and agree (2)).

	B-Coefficient	Standard error	p value significance
Gender	-0.272	0.116	0.019*
Age	0.009	0.003	0.008**
Education	0.104	0.105	0.322
Employment	-0.078	0.106	0.460
Migration background	0.144	0.107	0.177
Financial situation	-0.011	0.107	0.920
Religion	0.130	0.103	0.206
Born in Germany	-0.220	0.204	0.280
Constant	1.197	0.210	0.000
R2 (Cox & Snell)	0.005		
N	3142		
Means	Male: 4.226	Female: 4.372	

Significance: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.000$

you agree fully, partly or not at all to the following statements about your voluntary work? Through volunteering, I want to ...'. Two of the answer codes to this question show significant differences by gender: 'Take a stand against racism', and 'Show that, besides right-wing populism and violence, a culture of welcome also exists'/'acting against right-wing mobilisation in my city/neighbourhood' (code slightly adapted for the 2016 wave).

The first answer code 'Take a stand against racism' shows a very high significance by gender ($p = 0.000$), with women being more likely to agree than men. The only other significant variable that influences the likelihood to agree is having a migration background. Those with an own or family experience of migration are less likely to agree that they want to take a stand against racism (Table 4).

The other statistically notable answer code 'Welcome culture/against right-wing mobilisation' is highly significant by gender as well, with women being more likely to agree by a p-value of $p = 0.000$. Similar to the above finding, those who were not born in Germany are less likely to agree with this answer as well.

Notably, other variables that were highly statistically significant for gender related to an interest in a different culture. For example, a logistic regression analysis of the volunteering reward 'Insight into different cultures' delivers a p-value of $p = 0.000$ for women being more likely to agree. A similar result can be observed regarding women's agreement to other items relating to culture. Consequently, women seem to value the cultural difference and diversity they experience in refugee support work more, which potentially informs and motivates their aim to act against racism and for a 'welcome culture' (Table 5).

Table 4. Net agreement to 'Take a stand against racism' (strongly agree (1) and agree (2)).

	B-Coefficient	Standard error	p value significance
Gender	-1.226	0.188	0.000***
Age	-0.003	0.006	0.693
Education	0.075	0.191	0.695
Employment	0.061	0.196	0.756
Migration background	0.549	0.188	0.004**
Financial situation	0.171	0.197	0.387
Religion	0.355	0.188	0.059
Born in Germany	-0.252	0.340	0.460
Constant	3.162	0.396	0.000
R2 (Cox & Snell)	0.018		
N	3164		
Means	Male: 1.366	Female: 1.193	

Significance: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$

Table 5. Net agreement to ‘Insight into different cultures’ (strongly agree (4) and agree (3)).

	B-Coefficient	Standard error	p value significance
Gender	−0.568	0.094	0.000***
Age	0.001	0.003	0.612
Education	−0.087	0.087	0.319
Employment	−0.080	0.089	0.369
Migration background	−0.123	0.092	0.179
Financial situation	0.015	0.089	0.868
Religion	−0.032	0.085	0.706
Born in Germany	−0.575	0.168	0.001**
Constant			
R2 (Cox & Snell)	0.016		
N	3108		
Means	Male: 3.808	Female: 4.164	

Significance: *p ≤ 0.05, **p ≤ 0.01, ***p ≤ 0.000

Discussion

Taken together, the empirical results support both hypotheses of this study. An analysis of the main tasks and motivations in refugee support work demonstrates that the activity constitutes a form of care work. The large over-representation of women among volunteers confirms that women are more drawn to care work in the case of refugee support as well. Notwithstanding, for women, the meaning of voluntary work with refugees evidently has political dimensions, as they were significantly more likely to agree with some political aims than men. Female volunteers employ volunteering as a tool to speak up against racism and right-wing hostility against immigrants. This relates to another motivation to get involved in volunteering with refugees, an interest in foreign cultures. Once again, this study showed that women’s interests and actions are not only restricted to an unpolitical domestic sphere. Instead, they use different, more unconventional means of political expression and participation that better fit to their everyday lives but conform to still prevailing cultural norms of acceptable forms of public activism for women (Sartori et al., 2017).

This finding profoundly resonates with the fundamental feminist credo that ‘the personal is political’. Volunteering with refugees similarly transcends the female-coded, private realm of care and enters the public sphere of anti-racist politics. After the summer of 2015, few other topics were as present in the public and political discourse in Germany and worldwide than immigration and refugees, which is why it is remarkable that especially women position themselves so clearly in the debate and thereby defy the stereotype of women shying away from political conflict (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010). Particularly, young feminist activists and scholars increasingly point out the continuities between feminism and anti-racism. Specifically, they react to a new right-wing discursive strategy that co-opts feminism for racist claims in what Sara R. Farris (2017) termed ‘femonationalism’. In Germany, this debate largely revolves around the events at Cologne during New Year’s Eve 2016, when groups of men of North-African or Arab descent supposedly attacked and sexually assaulted women. Afterwards, right-wing populists proclaimed themselves feminists to protect German women from male migrants constructed as hyper-sexual misogynists. As Stefanie C. Boulila and Christiane Carri (2017, p. 292) pointed out, the discourse around Cologne exemplifies the intersectional interplay between anti-feminism and racism, as ‘Cologne has proven anti-racist feminism as the only political discourse that dismantles the intertwined logics of post-feminist “common-sense” scripts and racialised configurations.’ German women’s voluntary work with refugees thus constitutes one manifestation of this relation between anti-racist and feminist activism.

Above all, the interrelation of acts and actualisations of care and anti-racist political expression opens up the debate on whether care values enable a more constructive negotiation of difference. Remarkably, women are more open towards other cultures than men in the present study, and the political demand they champion through their voluntary work takes the form of a call for an open, tolerant and welcoming society. Might these female volunteers demonstrate an innovative, more

suitable politics of accepting and integrating migrants, informed by a sense of empathy and interest in different cultures?

Indeed, when revisiting her work, Carol Gilligan (2011) herself pointed to the transformative potential of an ethics of care for the politics of resistance. She asserted that the feminine ethics of care becomes a human ethic once it is understood in a democratic framework free of patriarchal constraints. Ultimately, she demonstrated, cooperation, interdependence and understanding are inherently human traits. A recent generation of scholars followed Gilligan's lead and expanded the concept of the ethics of care to a global scale, aspiring to develop 'a new political theory that can usefully guide analysis and action under contemporary conditions [...] [in an] increasingly inter-related and networked society' (Engster & Hamington, 2015, p. 7). In this perspective, care-informed global ethics can better grasp today's hybrid, emotive transnational everyday practices and cosmopolitan encounters (Nava, 2002), which the findings of this study support. Conceivably, relying on care values such as empathy, listening, inclusion and bonding, female volunteers may better recognise the 'other' represented by refugees. In combination with political activism, they could then establish an alternative path to global unity that challenges existing political hierarchies and is better equipped to deal with today's conditions of increased globalisation, dynamics of migration and societal diversification. Certainly, as Carol Gilligan (2011) reminded us, the reality of global interconnectedness and interdependence is impossible to deny today, rendering the ethic of care more relevant and necessary than ever before. Therefore, Virginia Held (2014) suggested that we need a radical transformation of politics, society, the economy, the legal system and the personal sphere towards a 'world of caring' that ensures peaceful coexistence around the globe.

However, it is important to note that in care work, and particularly in refugee support work, considerable power differentials between care-giver and care-receiver complicate their relationship further. Critical care theorists such as Lynch (2015), Narayan (1995) or Williams (2001) pointed out the danger of paternalism and disregard of the actual needs of the care-recipients in their 'best interest' that disrupt trust and the efficiency of care, and can promote social injustice and domination. As various studies have shown, paternalistic dynamics do frequently unfold in German refugee support work (Braun, 2017; Omwenyeke, 2016). On a theoretical level, this is exacerbated by care ethics' origin and firm localisation in the Global North, often rendering dissenting or alternative voices invisible (Graham, 2007; Raghuram, 2016). Indeed, the field of disability studies fiercely attacked the ethics of care for neglecting the views of care-receivers while over-researching and over-emphasizing those of care-givers, a tendency this article consolidates as well (Lloyd, 2000). Moreover, according to disability scholars this perspective tends to keep care-recipients in a state of dependency meaning they possess little autonomy or power themselves (Hughes, McKie, Hopkins, & Watson, 2005). Thus, despite the celebration of the ethics of care as a political alternative, it remains an increasingly contested concept particularly from a postcolonial and disability studies point of view.

Similarly, there are a number of other limitations and opportunities for further research resulting from these findings. As mentioned above, the Germany-wide *Freiwilligensurvey* is due to be carried out again in 2019. Relating it to the current study would enable an analysis of demographic and socio-economic differences between volunteers generally and volunteers working with refugees, potentially offering a structural explanation to women's over-representation in refugee support work. An intersectional analysis of the profile of female volunteers in refugee support work could also help determine who is still excluded from voluntary work, and why. Additionally, other comparative studies could relate these findings to the larger societal context, for example contrasting them with women who are not volunteering. This would help determine in more detail whether the results can be generalised any further. Furthermore, it might be interesting to put the study into context with women holding right-wing attitudes, as research found that women in Germany are as or even more racist than men (Zick, Küpper, & Krause, 2016). Considering that the openness to other cultures does not necessarily apply to all German women opens up the question of how care work may be politicised, or not, in a right-wing political context.

Finally, it is important to recognise the discursive construction of the value statements this quantitative study relies upon. Any seemingly 'objective' motive is only meaningful in the particular context it was articulated in and essentially remains dynamic and particular (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Motives mostly operate unconsciously through internalised cultural codes and sometimes might be out of reach for conscious rationalisations in quantitative surveys. Therefore, a deeper qualitative exploration might gain more insight into the actual construction of values of care or anti-racism and uncover their purpose for the construction of the volunteers' self, a perspective still missing in this article. Moreover, it could analyse the reasons why female volunteers are particularly attracted to different cultures, how they understand 'culture' and its relation to the research subjects' identities as both women and volunteers.

Conclusion

Proceeding from the question of why women disproportionately volunteer in refugee support work, this article demonstrated that women's motivations both encompass care values and political aims. The political dimension manifests in the employment of voluntary activity as a signal against racism and right-wing populism. A binary logistic regression analysis of two waves of a quantitative study on German volunteers in refugee support work found that women are more likely to agree that their voluntary work aims at taking a stand against racism and campaigning against right-wing mobilisation or for a welcome culture. They also display a higher interest in other cultures. Consequently, the article argued that refugee support work not only symbolises a variant of care work in the private sphere that is typically attributed to women, but should also be recognised as a political expression of values of openness and anti-racism. Therefore, it represents a form of political activism as well. Voluntary refugee support might be especially attractive for women not only because it speaks to a care-orientation, but because it serves as a platform for their political demands as well.

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